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Charlestown

Neighborhood Profile

1988

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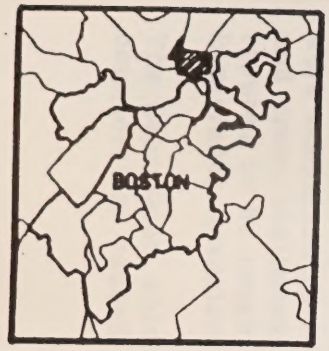
PLANNING DISTRICT #2
CHARLESTOWN
AND NEIGHBORHOOD STATISTICAL AREAS



EVERETT

MYSTIC RIVER

SOMERVILLE

#5 MEDFORD ST/
THE NECK

BUNKER HILL ST

#6 THOMPSON SQ/
BUNKER HILL/TOWN HILL

RUTHERFORD AV

CHELSEA ST

0 1000 2000 3000 FT

.5 MILES

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CHARLESTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE

Introductory overview

In the mid-1960s, Charlestown was considered a declining neighborhood. Its population had been reduced by one-half since 1950, its housing stock was old and deteriorated, its commercial areas were inadequate, unsafe and unattractive, its narrow streets were congested and in bad repair, the elevated line cast a blighting shadow on Main Street, and a general lack of confidence prevailed. The situation called for prompt and dramatic action: Urban Renewal.

In recent years there has been a substantial investment of money and effort, both public and private, firstly through the Charlestown Urban Renewal Project, and then through the transformation of the Charlestown Navy Yard. These initiatives have clearly improved the community's physical appearance, restored resident confidence in the future of the area, and attracted many new residents.

The redevelopment of the former Boston Naval Shipyard, made possible by funding from several federal agencies, is continuing to leverage many new private investments, producing much additional housing and creating construction jobs.

However, serious challenges remain, particularly in maintaining and improving the stock of affordable housing. Public housing, especially the Bunker Hill Project, remains a blighting influence on the surrounding neighborhoods.

I. Neighborhood History

Charlestown was settled before Boston in the early 17th century and developed separately until it was annexed to Boston in 1874. It was already a thriving harborside community by the time of the Revolution, during which the British burned most of the town in the 1775 Battle of Bunker Hill. The town was rebuilt and once again flourished as a port. During the Golden Age of Sail, many wealthy captains and shipowners built grand houses for themselves and their families on the hillsides of Charlestown near the harbor.

The establishment and growth of the Boston Naval Shipyard in Charlestown in the early 1800s produced a mixture of industry and port-related activities, as well as large sections of tenement housing for the workers, which continue to this day. This working class housing served as first homes for waves of European immigrants, especially Irish, during the late 1800s, and again during World War I.

Improved transportation connections to Boston, most notably the elevated transit line constructed at the beginning of the 20th century, made Charlestown even more suitable for working class housing. At the same time many of the wealthy old families moved out of the town.

The demand for ships generated by World War I increased activity at the Shipyard, which in turn put new pressure on the housing stock. During this period many homes were converted to rooming houses to meet the demand from workers new to the town and crews stationed here while their ships were being repaired. The neighborhood was reputed to be rough and dangerous because of the concentration of lower income immigrants, transient workers, and sailors.

The Depression which followed the boom of wartime activity accelerated the process of deterioration caused by overcrowding and lack of public and private investment. The

population began to decrease during the Depression years and with the exception of a period of expanded wartime production during World War II, the downward spiral continued until the Urban Renewal Program began to show results in the late 1970s.

Table Ia. Charlestown Population and Housing, 1950 - 1980
(in persons and dwelling units)

	1950	1960	1970	1980
Population	31,332 (3.9)	20,147 (2.9)	15,353 (2.4)	13,364 (2.4)
Housing units	6,957 (3.1)	6,440 (2.7)	5,119 (2.2)	6,121 (2.5)
Persons/unit	4.5	3.1	3.0	2.2

Note: figures in brackets are percent of Boston total.
Source: a)
See section at end of profile describing sources, as well as the methodology.

II. Demographics

Charlestown, Boston's smallest planning district, is a virtually all-white, Irish-American neighborhood that has experienced substantial changes in population characteristics since 1970. Fifteen years ago, the typical Charlestown resident was an adult, with a high school education or less, living in a family household, working in a manufacturing plant and earning a modest income. In the last ten years, Charlestown has attracted many new residents, primarily young, well-educated adults in professional occupations, earning above-average incomes.

In 1985, Charlestown had an estimated population of 14,115, up 6% from 1980. Of these, 13,975 were living in 6,076 households, and the balance, 140 persons, were housed in group quarters.

Table IIa. Population, 1985*

	Total	Population in group quarters	Household population	Persons per household
Charlestown	13,441	242	13,199	2.3
City of Boston	601,095	49,595	551,500	2.4

* Note difference between total population and household population. Most of the following tables refer to household population as explained in the end notes for source b).

Median age in Charlestown in 1985 was almost four years higher than the city median, and the neighborhood housed virtually no minority residents. It also had more traditional, older couples, and fewer single parent families than the city average.

Table IIb. Age Composition of Household Population, 1985
(in percent)

	Median age	0-14	15-24	25-34	35-54	55+
Charlestown	32.5 yrs	20	15	22	24	19
City of Boston	28.8 yrs	17	23	22	20	18

Note: Percent may not total to 100 due to rounding.
Source: b)

Table IIc. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Household Population, 1985
(in percent)

	White, not Hispanic	Black	Hispanic*	Asian	Other races
Charlestown	97	0	1	1	0
City of Boston	62	25	7	5	1

Note: Percent may not total to 100 due to rounding.
Source: b)
* Hispanic includes self-designated Hispanics plus those who speak Spanish in the home or were born in a Spanish-speaking country.

Table IId. Household Composition, 1985
(in percent)

	Traditional families and couples	Single parent households	Single person household	Household of unrelated individuals
Charlestown	42	10	38	10
City of Boston	36	16	34	14

Note: Percent may not total to 100 due to rounding.
Source: b)

III. Income and poverty

As a consequence of its new residents, median household income in Charlestown was estimated to be near the city median, and except for unrelated individuals, it had a slightly lower percentage of persons in poverty than the city average.

Table IIIa. Median Household Income and Portion in Poverty, 1979 and 1984

	Median household income		Percent in poverty			
	1979	1984	1979 all persons	1984 all persons	1984 all families	1984 unrelated persons
Charlestown	$12,738	$20,000	18	17	17	16
City of Boston	12,530	19,250	20	21	22	17

Source: b)

IV. Mobility and Migration

Despite recent in-migration, Charlestown in 1986 had a considerably largwer portion of its residents born locally, as well as more than its share of very longterm residents, compared to Boston as a whole.

Table IVa. Place of Birth of 1985 Residents
(in percent)

	Massachusetts	Other U.S. and Canada	Europe	Elsewhere
Charlestown	68	28	3	1
City of Boston	55	25	5	15

Note: Percent may not total to 100 due to rounding.
Source: b)

Table IVb. Years in Dwelling Unit of 1985 Residents
(in percent)

	>2	2-5	6-10	11-15	16+
Charlestown	22	28	17	9	24
City of Boston	28	27	16	10	19

Note: Percent many not total to 100 due to rounding.
Source: b)

V. Employment

Charlestown had a higher labor participation rate of nearly three out of four, compared to the city's two out of three, but its unemployment rate was also higher. Manufacturing, though in decline, is currently still the largest source of employment in the area. However, the redevelopment of the Charlestown Navy Yard is creating a unique addition to the neighborhood. Developers have already converted many of its historic buildings into office and retail space that will support, by 1988, over 6,000 employees. This will soon almost double the economic base of Charlestown.

Table Va. Labor Force Status, Spring 1985
(in percent)

	Participation rate (Persons aged 16 yrs +)	Unemployment rate
Charlestown	73	8
City of Boston	66	6

Source: b)

Compared to the citywide pattern, more of Charlestown's residents were employed in finance, insurance and real estate, as well as government, and fewer were engaged in trades and services. In terms of jobs located within the neighborhood, over one-third of Charlestown's 7,400 jobs were in manufacturing in 1983

Table Vb. Industry of Resident Workers, 1985
(in percent)

	Manuf'g	Trade	F.I.R.E*	Services	Gov't	Other**
Charlestown	13	11	16	28	16	16
City of Boston	14	16	8	36	11	15

Note: Percent may not total to 100 due to rounding.
Source: b)
* F.I.R.E. is an abbreviation for Finance, Insurance and Real Estate.
** includes transportation, communications, public utilities and construction

Table Vc. Employment Located Within Neighborhood, 1983
(in percent)

	Manuf'g	Trade	F.I.R.E.	Services	Gov't	Other
Charlestown	2,500	1,800	200	1,100	1,200	600
City of Boston	48,900	81,000	78,800	171,000	91,500	58,100

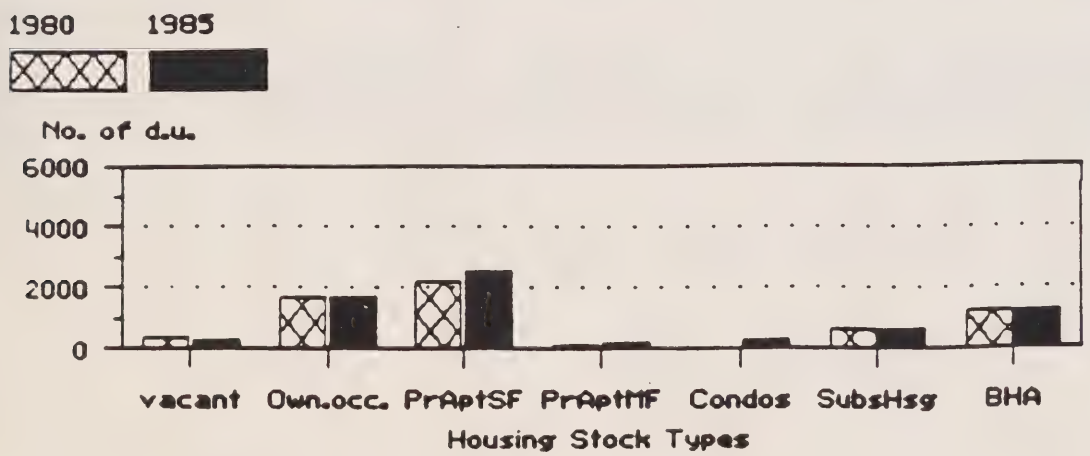
Source: c)

VI. Housing

Despite 27 percent of its existing housing being made up of public and publicly-assisted dwellings, the growing attractiveness of Charlestown is reflected in its rapidly changing real estate market: mean housing values more than tripled in the last five years.

This has sparked a surge of condominium conversions in its triple-decker stock. More and more of the 4,588 units in its 1-4 family structures, 68% of Charlestown's total stock, are being converted into condominiums. As of the end of 1985, 423 of the neighborhood's 6,767 housing units were condominiums, up from 234 in June 1985. Residential development within the Navy Yard has also recently added 388 additional housing units, mostly condominiums, and many times that number of units are currently still under development, completely transforming this part of Charlestown.

Table VIa. Housing Stock Composition by Structure Types, 1980 and 1985
(in dwelling units)



CHARLESTOWN	Private Housing and Condos						Assisted Housing		
Stock type:	1-4 vacant	Own.occ.	PrAptSF	PrAptMF	CondoSF	CondoMF	SubsHsg	BHA	Total
1-4(SF)/5+(MF)	1-4(SF)	1-4(SF)	1-4(SF)	5+(MF)	1-4(SF)	5+(MF)	Mixed	5+(MF)	Mixed
1980	8% 369	1,645	2,198	50	0	10	598	1,245	5,115
% of pl.dist.	6	27	36	1	0	0	10	20	100
1985	6% 275	1,692	2,497	196	124	110	628	1,245	6,767
% of pl.dist.	4	25	37	3	2	2	9	18	100
change '80-'85	(94)	47	299	146	124	100	30	0	652
% chg from '80	(25)	3	14	292	inf	1,000	5	0	11

Source: c)

Values of 1-3 family properties in Charlestown have surged from well below the City median in 1979 to considerably above it in 1985. Median rents have as yet not risen commensurately. Instead, formerly affordable rentals are being converted into condominiums.

Table VIb. Median Property Values and Rents in 1-3 Family Structures, 1979 and 1985
(in current dollars)

	Property values		Monthly rents	
	1979	1985	1980	1985
Charlestown	$36,000	$140,000	$215	$320
City of Boston	32,000	115,000	254	400

Source: d)

VII. Transportation

Even though old Charlestown is particularly well served by public transportation and parking there is a serious challenge, the extremes within the planning district average out to patterns very near the City averages.

Table VIIa. Means of Household Transportation to Work, 1985
(in percent)

	Vehicle	MBTA	Walk	Other
Charlestown	50	30	17	6
City of Boston	50	33	15	3

Note: Percent many not total to 100 due to rounding.
Source: b)

Table VIIb. Number of Vehicles Owned per Household, 1985
(in percent)

	None	1	2	3 or more
Charlestown	33	50	12	5
City of Boston	39	42	14	6

Note: Percent many not total to 100 due to rounding.
Source: b)

VII. Summary of Recent and Imminent Development

Charlestown investment is expected to total $347.2 M (million) during the 1975 to 1989 period, according to source e). The major development activity in Charlestown is $166 M (million) in residential development, which is 48 percent of the total investment. This will have produced a total of 2,432 dwelling units (DU), which consists of 1,359 DU of adaptive reuse construction (56%), 1,025 units of new construction (42%), and 48 renovated units (2%) during this period. The Charlestown residential market can be subdivided into two market areas consisting of its historic neighborhood and the Navy Yard. The latter accounts for 1,588 of the above units, or two-thirds of all new units.

Office development is second in Charlestown, with $73.4 M, or 21 percent of the district total. The office industry will have developed a total of 957,700 square feet (SF) of space in Charlestown between 1984 and 1989; 178,200 SF will be new office space (19%), 768,800 SF will be adaptive reuse space (80%), plus 10,700 SF of renovated space (1%). The Charlestown office market also has its two components. The Navy Yard office space will total 716,000 SF, providing 75 percent of the Charlestown total, while the Neighborhood will have 241,000 SF.

Industrial development is returning to Charlestown. The 1980's have brought investments totalling $28.6 M. These investments have developed 1.2 M SF of industrial space. The major projects include the 562,000 SF H. P. Hood Plant and the 328,000 SF Schraffts Center.

Other significant sectors of the Charlestown economy include medical research ($22 M), parking and transportation ($17 M), retail ($16 M), recreation and culture ($14 M), and educational ($9.5 M).

Sources and Methodology

a) - *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1950 - 1980*

b) - *B.R.A. and P.F.D. Household Survey, 1985*, conducted by the Center for Survey Research, U. Mass. at Boston. A sample of over 2,000 households, carefully drawn to reflect Boston's household population, was questioned in the spring of 1980, to parallel the 1980 U.S. Census. In 1985, exactly five years later, the same methodology was employed again to obtain an update and to identify neighborhood shifts. This survey did not include the group quarters population

To learn more about changes in these planning districts by 1985, the several thousand observations available from the 1985 BRA/PFD Household Survey were differentiated to the limit. Knowing such changes as the shift in number of persons by race/ethnicity and age group in each district is valuable for planning. However, this divides the available data into so many cells that it limits reliability tests. The inferences should therefore be viewed as suggestive rather than conclusive.

c) - *Boston's Changing Housing Patterns, 1970 to 1985*, Rolf Goetze, consultant to the B.R.A., November 1986. The 1980 U.S. Census does not specifically identify assisted dwelling units or the structure types within which they occur. It also does not indicate the type of stock in which condominiums are located, or when rental dwellings are in resident-owned structures. Therefore, available city data were carefully analyzed to obtain an overview and identify current housing patterns, as described in this source paper.

To aid in tracing the 1980 to 1985 changes in Table VIa, the housing stock was divided into units located in 1-4 unit structures, and those in 5 or more multi-unit structures. The 1-4s, dubbed **1-4(SF)** for single family, are largely singles, duplexes and triple-deckers, and tend to have a high rate of owner occupancy. **PrAptSF** designates the private apartments rented in this stock. In 1984, significant condominium conversion of triple-deckers commenced in some districts, shown as **CondoSF**.

Multifamily is designated as **5+(MF)**, and includes private rentals in this stock, **PrAptMF**, and condominiums, **CondoMF**, as well as public housing owned and managed by the Boston Housing Authority, **BHA**. Subsidized housing, **SubsHsg**, refers the to privately-owned developments assisted under such federal programs as Section 221(d)(3), Section 236, and Section 8, as well as state assistance programs under EOCD and MHFA. The newly built assisted housing tends to be in multifamily structures, whereas the rehabilitated stock is more likely to be in 1-4 unit stock.

Table VIa also shows how the total stock in each time period is distributed, as well as the absolute and percent change.

d) - *U.S. Bureau of the Census, "County Business Patterns," 1983*

e) - *A Summary and Survey of Development in Boston, 1975 - 1989*, John Avault and Mark Johnson, April 1987, based on compilations maintained on "ULTRALIST" by the BRA Research Department

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